

## CHRONICLE

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## On Censorship In a Cold War

**IT IS CERTAIN** President Kennedy's concept of a voluntary censorship by American newspapers in the present crisis would not work, even more certain it would be a grave curtailment of the rights and freedoms of the people if it were attempted.

The concept as the President advanced it is formless in an immense sort of way, and his effort to equate the current world struggle with open warfare is unrealistic.

Even in open warfare censorship is a difficult problem. In the Civil War it devolved on the army commanders, who were not very successful at it. In the wars of our century the government has had a fairly workable legal control over military news. The newspapers also exercised voluntary censorship, but consider this case: two battleships collided in the Pacific, putting them out of commission for awhile. This was clearly censorable, and no news stories appeared, but the whole San Francisco waterfront knew it in 24 hours.



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**IN OPEN WARFARE** there are clear-cut cases where unwarranted publication can cause heavy loss of life, even failure of a battle or campaign.

But in cold war, so-called, there is no standard for judging if a given circumstance or development is one impairing the national security. There are manifest cases in a cold war, but many more which are not manifest.

The United States has sufficient law and regulation to deal with manifest cases, for instance, in the research and development of certain weapons systems at certain stages. Mr. Kennedy's men classify this information, and quite justifiably. But how will you classify the information that Central Intelligence Agency made a hell of a mess in the Cuban landing? As in the case of the battleships, the whole Miami waterfront knew all about it.

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**LET US SUPPOSE** there had been an almost total voluntary censorship in the Cuban case, who would benefit—CIA, the United States, American prestige or the American people?

First, you don't benefit by a cover-up of error. You are cemented in error. Goering assured Hitler in a cold war stage he could destroy Britain from the air. Did the Luftwaffe, the German people, or even Hitler benefit from this error?

The President says he does not seek to suppress dissent. But unhappily for him—or any President—dissent in the form of questioning judgment and policy is at the heart of large areas of national and world news. Dissent comes in many grades, from the outrageously unjust to right on the nose. Yet much of it is the very stuff of our freedom and right of self-government. Any massive silence as to the realities we face in the world and history is a negation of all we have ever stood for, and a desertion to the camp of blind authoritarianism.

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